DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 156 321 PS 009 950

TITLE	Increasing the Effectiveness of Foster Care Through the Use of the Service Contract with Children, Natural Parents, Foster Parents, and Workers. Final Report.
INSTITUTION	Iowa State Dept. of Social Services, Des Moines.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Human Development (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	12 Aug 77
GRANT	90-C-251
NOTE	45p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Caseworker Approach; Child Welfare; *Demonstration Projects; *Foster Children; *Foster Family; *Parents; *Performance Contracts; Social Work; State Surveys
IDENTIFIERS	*Iowa

ABSTRACT

This report describes a demonstration project in which service contracts were used as part of the caseworker approach to increase the effectiveness of foster care for children. The service contracts involved formal or informal agreements defining expectations for performance on the part of the children in foster care, the foster parents, and the natural parents. Although the project initially recommended written contracts between all parties, verbal agreements were found to be preferable in actual practice. Iowa social workers were randomly selected and were trained for participation in the project. A sample of 52 children under 18 years of age, but old enough to understand the service contract, was admitted to the project. A matched group of children in foster care was also identified for comparison purposes. At the end of the project, 46 of the 52 project children were out of foster care. The average length of stay for children in this group was 9.4 months. For the matching group the average length of stay was 11.7 months. Two factors were identified as contributing to the decrease in length of time in foster care for the project children: the work with the natural parents; and the continuing training for workers in general social work practice during the period of the project. (JMB)

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IOWA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

DIVISION OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

FOSTER CARE RESEARCH PROJECT:

Increasing the Effectiveness of Foster Care Through the Use of the Service Contract with Children, Natural Parents, Foster Parents, and Workers

FINAL REPORT

August 12, 1977

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PS 009950

Acknowledgement

This report is the culmination of three years of hard work by many persons in the Iowa Department of Social Services. It was made possible by Bernice Kennedy, Chief, U.S. Children's Bureau, Region VII, and Catherine Williams, who was head of the Division of Community Services at the time the project started.

The idea tested in the project was developed by Roger Chapman, Dariene Clark, Judy Foote, Jack Harvey, Philip D. Johnson, William L. Miller, Michael J. O'Bannon, Jo Sheeley and Michael K. Thomas. This group became the Steering Committee; later they were joined by LaVon Hamelster, Pam Luiken, Gary Moe and Helen Schmitt.

The training was done by Joanne Mermelstein and Paul Sundet, of the University of Missouri-Columbia, School of Social Work, with the great help of Bob Ferrier of the Staff Development Department of the Department of Social Services.

The workers and supervisors, who had to fill out the forms, come to the meetings, and carry the day to day responsibility for the project cases, in addition to their full time jobs doing many other things, must also be recognized. These persons include: Lyola Baker, Mark Baty, Jill Beatty, James Berhow, Marilyn Boley, Betty Breithaupt, Patricia Brinkmann, LaVerne Buttjer, Roberta Bygness, Dale Carter, Karen M. Combs, Ruth Crawford, Celestine Cross, Karen Day, Robert Drake, Lois Jean Dyer, Connie Easton, Margaret Ekstrom, Eleanor Elbert, Margaret Fish, Milagros Garcia, LaVerne M. Glendenning, Michael Gorton, Mary L. Guthrie, Larry T. Harvey, Sheryl Hammel, Kaye Haskins, Kathy Hill, Bruce Hofmaster, Marcella Hoffman, Joyce Hoppenworth, Donna J. Huston, Carol Ives, Carol J. Jewell, Paula H. Johnson, Ron Kemp, Margaret Klinger, Vera Lawlor, Charlotte J. Linden, Linda Longstreet, Pamela Luiken, Rhonda Magill, Glenn Major, Sharon Mathison, Jean McIntosh, Kathy McCauley, Steven J. Martyr, Susan R. McLain, Gary Moe, Hildreth Murphy, J. Kenneth Nichols, Nancy Palmer, David Pan, Mari Lynn Reynolds, Jean Ritchie, Aletharae Rogers, Helen Schmitt, Mark F. Schultz, Arling Smith, Carolyn Smith, Dorothy Stolz, Michael Tallman, Michael K. Thomas, Ed Tindall, Kathie Tindall, and Phyllis Trites.

There were many others who participated briefly, including the workers and supervisors who supplied information about the match group, and administrators who permitted or encouraged workers to participate.

For me, the project meant three years of association with people who really cared about children and families and about how to provide the best services possible. My respect for my colleagues in public welfare has deepened as all tried to develop some answers and raised some new questions together.

Edith Zober
Project Director and
Principal Investigator

August 12, 1977

Table of Contents

		Page
Introduction		
Part I.	Background of the Project	3
	Selection of Children for the Foster Care Project . .	5
	Characteristics of the Children in the Foster Care Project	7
	Comparison Group of Children	8
Part II.	Comparison of the Project Group and Match Group . . .	12
	Length of Time in Foster Care and Cost of Foster Care	12
	Assessment of Outcome of Foster Care	13
Part III.	Additional Selected Outcomes of Children in the Project	15
	Living Arrangements Following Foster Care For the Children Who Completed the One-Year Follow-Up Period.	15
	The Children Who Did Not Complete the One-Year Follow-Up Period	16
Part IV.	The Work With the Natural Parents	17
Part V.	The Work With the Foster Family	27
Part VI.	The Impact of the Project on the Workers and on Their Associates	31
	The Importance of Continuing Staff Development Activities on a Regular Basis	32
	The Impact of the Training Beyond Workers Immediately Involved in the Project	34
	Relationship Between the Training and Worker Trunover in the Department of Social Services	35
	Worker Turnover at Other Levels	36
Part VII	Summary and Recommendations for Research	37

List of Tables

Table 1.	Characteristics of Children in the Project at Time of Intake	7
Table 2.	Comparison of Cost and Length of Stay of Project and Match Group Children at the End of the One Year Period After Project Children Left Foster Care	12
Table 3.	Length of Time in Foster Care of Project and Match Children	12

Table of Contents

Page

List of Tables (con't)

Table 4. Cost of Foster Care of Project and Match Children by Length of Stay in Foster Care 13

Table 5. A Comparison of the Outcome From Project and Matching Children at the End of the One Year Period After Project Children Left Foster Care, Based on Social Worker's Judgement 14

Table 6. Living Arrangement Following Foster Care in Relation to Plan at Intake 15

Table 7. Living Arrangement at End of the Project Period and Length of Stay in Foster Care of Children Who Did Not Complete the One-Year Follow-Up Period 16

Table 8. Goal and Outcome of Project Children Who Did Not Complete the One Year Follow-Up Period 17

Table 9. Perception of Workers and by Mothers of Problems at The Time of Intake 18

Table 10. Services to Natural Parents of Children in the Project, by Percent 20

Table 11. Summary of Services Provided to Natural Parents, by Frequency 21

List of Figures

Figure 1. County of Intake of Children in the Foster Care Project. 6

Figure 2. Summary of the Problems of the Children in the Foster Care Project 9

Introduction

This project started out with one idea and ended up with something entirely different. It started out with an attempt to demonstrate something narrow, - - the use of a service contract which was explicit and limited in scope - - as a way of improving the situation of children in Foster Care; it ended up with something broad - - the worker's understanding of and commitment to general social work practice as the way to improve the situation of children in Foster Care.

The following pages will show the details of two and a half years of developing a workable interpretation of a service contract. It started out with the goal of a written contract as the contract of first choice - with details regarding what each person would do and when it would be done; with procedures for changing the contract; with sincere effort to have tangible evidence that if one does thus and so, the results will be predictable. It started out with the idea that if a written contract could not be achieved, a verbal contract, with details of the contract written into the record, would be acceptable as the next best thing. It ended up with "the next best thing" becoming the "best thing" and the written contract used in only a minority of the cases and situations. Instead the effort was directed to general social work practice in which the worker learned to assess the entire situation in which the client was immersed, and based on that assessment to make a decision about where to intervene and how to engage the client as partner in the change plan. An education plan for workers was developed, predicated on the idea that given the traditional values and knowledge of social work, the practitioner assesses social phenomena in all their systematic ramifications, and based on that assessment intervenes at whatever level or levels is efficient and effective within his or her resources.

The reason for the change was that as the workers learned more and more about the dynamics of family life and the specifics of their social work tasks, the service contract in writing became unnecessary. Workers developed a depth of understanding of the families with whom they were working and were able to help them achieve the goals which were best for the children and the rest of the family. The process involved helping the family sort out their goals and develop priorities, and then helping the families achieve the goals. The workers learned to look for and build on the strengths in the family.

The workers learned to make the time to provide the family with the support they needed in arriving at their decisions.

They found for the most part, the parents did not want to terminate their contact with their children, even if their first description of the situation suggested that they might.

At the end of the project, forty-six of the fifty-two children were out of foster care. The average length of stay for the group was 9.4 months. Thirty-four of the children had completed the one-year follow-up period. The average length of stay for those children

was 7.5 months, with 88% of them returning to a home with one or both natural parents immediately after Foster Care. At the end of the one year follow-up period, only 1 of the 34 (3%) was again living in foster care. Efforts were made to compare these children with others not in the project. For the matching group the average length of stay was 11.7 months, which is longer than either the project group which completed the one year follow-up period or all the project children who are out of foster care at the time the project ended.

Another basis for comparison was the 1973 Iowa DSS survey of children in foster care which precede the project. In that study there had been an expectation that 712 children would return home; of this group, a little over half (51.6%) had been in foster care for ten months or more. It is not known whether these children did leave foster care, nor how long they remained in foster care. We do know that they had already been in foster care longer than the project children. Therefore, by comparing the children in the project with those in the match group and with the 1973 survey, the children in the project returned home in a shorter period of time, which also means a smaller dollar cost.

The two factors which contributed to the decrease in length of time in foster care were: (1) The work with the natural parents; and (2) The continuing training for workers in general social work practice during the period of the project.

The following pages show the details of the project, and the report ends with a suggestion of propositions to be tested with research.

Part I. Background of the Project

For a number of years the Iowa Department of Social Services has given a high priority to the care of children who could not be cared for by their own parents. The Bureau of Family and Adult Services expressed their interest in both the child and the family by stating the following goal for the Foster Care Program: To provide services to foster children which will enable them to return home where possible; to continue their ties with their natural family when return home is possible; and to make permanent plans for the child who has no parent or relative who shows concern for him or her.

In keeping with this goal, the Iowa Department of Social Services undertook a survey in January, 1973, to learn the situation of children placed in foster care in Iowa. That suvey included 5,481 children who were supervised by both public and private agencies.

The survey showed that of the total group, only 712 children, or 12.9% had, as a future plan, to return to their own homes. The survey dealt only with the social worker's expectation of the child's future plan. No indication was available from the survey of whether the children did return home.

The results of the survey were presented to a meeting of the Bureau of Children's and Adult Services in December, 1973. At that time a decision was made to try to demonstrate a way of working with children in foster care that would make greater use of the natural parents' input. A small group within the Bureau, including the Director of Field Services, the foster care specialist, the protective care specialist, the family planning specialist, two members of Staff Development, and the research specialist met together to decide on the plan.

A number of ideas was considered by the group, including the idea of a service contract. One of the members of the group had recently come from an agency that served emotionally disturbed children in a residential setting; he suggested that a contract might be an effective tool in a foster care program. It was discovered that three supervisors of field staffs were currently working with the contract as a way of improving services to children in foster care. These supervisors were added to the planning group.

After several meetings of the planning group, the specific area selected for demonstration was that of the work of the Department of Social Services with the natural parents and the relatives of children in foster care. The assumption was also made that the foster family must have a clearly defined role, in order to implement whatever plan is in the child's best interest.

Reasons for Emphasizing Work With the Natural Parents

The importance of the natural parents in the child's life has been documented in a number of studies.

The very circumstance of placing a child in foster care, where the care of the child is undertaken by people who are not his parents, is considered by those who are concerned with children as an extreme treatment method. The effect on a young child has been described by Myra Teider 1/ as an experience close to dying. After thirty years of involvement in foster care she stated that she is still uncertain about how to help children move from their own homes into foster care.

The Child Welfare League of America initiated a Foster Care Project in 1966. The first result of that effort was a report of current practices and attitudes from the field. The foster care project director said "we have a long list of what needs to be done, but the "how to do it" list is very short and is phrased in terms of the methods we have now." She said we need innovative and revolutionary approaches to get ahead of the ever-increasing demand for care...new approaches to NATURAL PARENTS, CREATIVE AFTER-CARE SERVICES...2/

Anthony Maluccio reported his study of foster care in which he found that foster family care of children was a system in transition: "A field of practice characterized by many problems and complexities and currently undergoing critical reassessment. Out of this process, a growing realization that drastic changes are necessary to make the system more responsive to contemporary needs and conditions emerging. Furthermore, while the bulk of work in foster care is still proceeding along traditional lines, there is evidence of the gradual development of a number of new directions and approaches. The more significant of these are in the following areas:..expansion of services to natural parents...3/"

The Iowa survey found that in many cases, the parents of children in foster care have to all intents and purposes disappeared from the child's life; in some cases, the parents' whereabouts were unknown to the child or the agency. We accepted the challenge of finding out whether more effective services to the parents at the point of referral and early in the placement could have prevented such total abandonment, with its inherent and oftern indelible damage to the child as well as the parents.

The proposal that developed was based upon the assumption that the foster child is a member of a family which, regardless of the current circumstance, has an important role to play in the child's future. Where the future plan includes foster care, the strengths of the natural family in planning for foster care and the exit from foster care should be used to insure the child's well-being. The assumption is also made that the foster family must have a more clearly defined role, in order to implement whatever plan is in the child's best interest. The worker, too, must have a clear understanding of his role, responsibilities, and method of operation.

1/ Myra Teider, "Thirty Years of Innovation in Foster Care", Children, Sept. - Oct., 1971.
2/ 1973 Bernice Q. Madison and Michael Schapiro, "New Perspectives on Child Welfare.
3/ 1973 Maluccio, Anthon N. "Foster Family Care Revisited: Problems and Prospects" Public Welfare 31 (2) 12-17.

In short, the proposal recognized the child in foster care as part of a system with four elements: The child, the natural family, the foster family and the worker, with special emphasis on the first of these.

For the purpose of this project, contracting referred to the negotiation of an agreement for the exchange of performances in the future. Contractual agreements were formal or informal. It was preferred that the contract be in writing. However, it was not required that the contract be in writing; if it was not, there was to be a record in the case file of the contractual agreement. Absence of definite case plan and mutual accountability for performance was the rationale for the use of this specific device - i.e. the contract.

In order for a child to participate in this project, the alternative of returning home had to be available. For this reason, two criteria were specified for a child to enter the project:

1. The child had to be entering foster care from a living situation with at least one natural parent. If the child had been in foster care before, there had to be a period of residence with the natural parent(s) before entering the project.

2. The natural parent(s) had to be available for the first interview.

The assumption was made that the worker would have the most favorable opportunity to work with the family toward resolution of the problem if the plan was developed while the family was still together. This was in contrast to families which had been separated for some time, where the parents and the child had already made some adjustment to their separation.

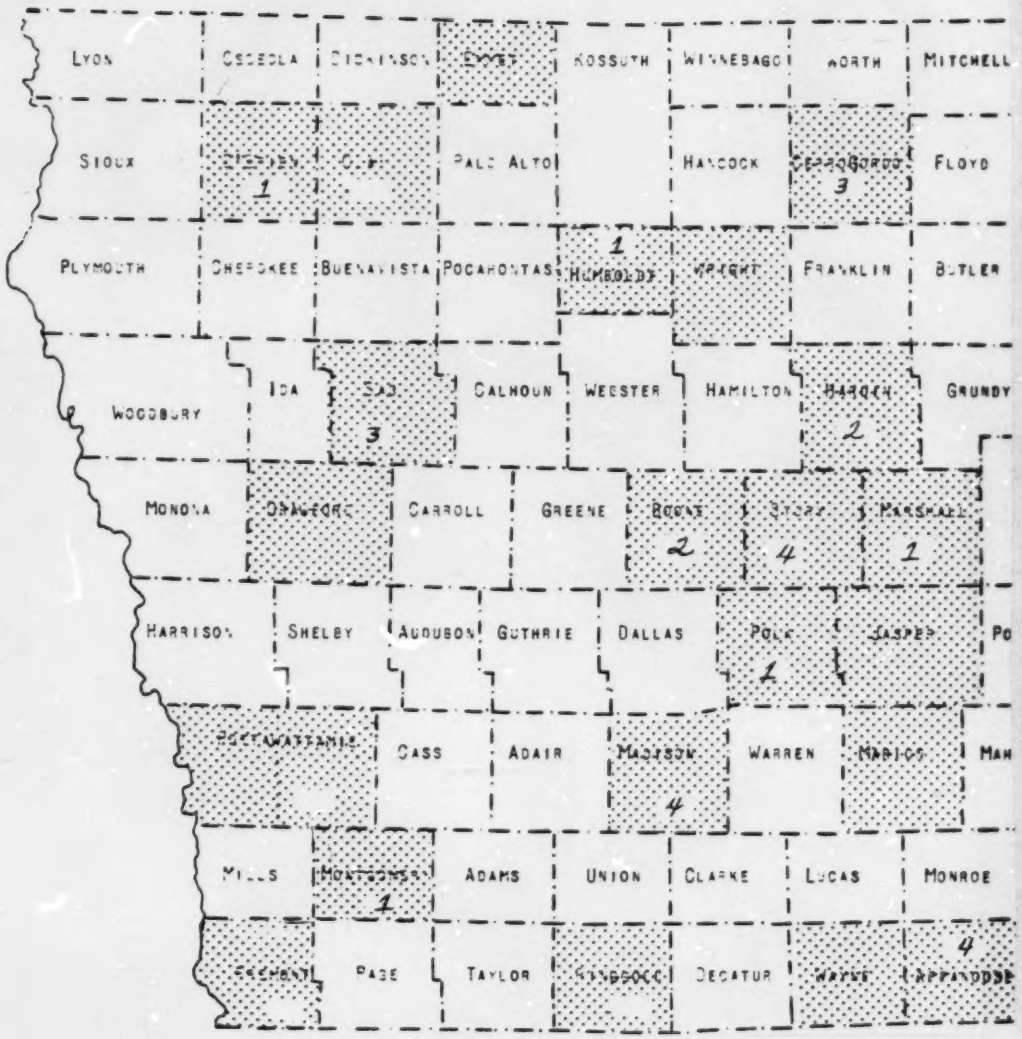
In addition, in order to be selected for the project, the child had to be mature enough to understand a contract. This refers to minimum age and mental ability. No criteria was specified; the worker's judgment was used for this factor. However, if a child was not accepted, the worker was asked to state the reason for exclusion. This was to avoid a hand-picked sample of cases that would have a better chance of a successful outcome than other cases.

The project had the goal, not only of planning and working toward exit from foster care, but of following the children for a year after they left, to see whether the goals accomplished during the time they were in foster care still held.

Selection of Children for the Foster Care Project

The design of the project required a sample of fifty children under age eighteen at the time of admission to the project. Because training of the workers was a key element in the foster care project, it was necessary to select the workers before any child could be admitted to the foster care project. Workers were selected at random from a list of all workers who provided foster care services to children during August, 1974, based on reports of service received in the Central Office of the Department of Social Services.

COUNTY OF INTAKE OF CHILDREN IN THE



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3 Counties Eligible for the Foster Care Project
Location of Children Who Met the Eligibility Criteria for the Pr
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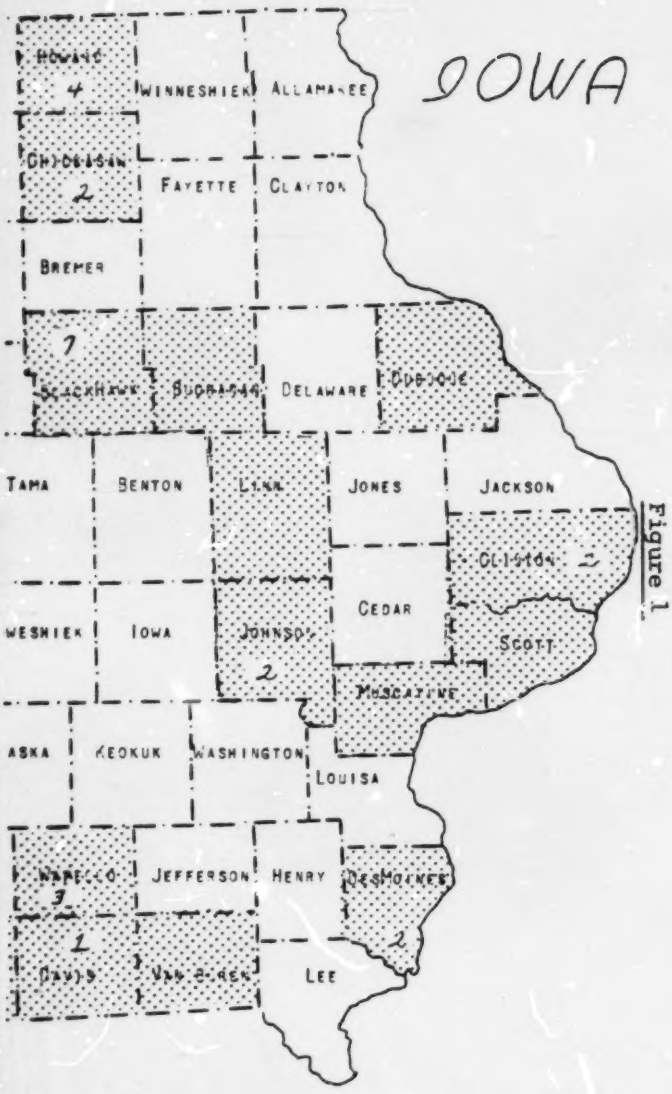

Figure 1

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oject and Who Entered the Project
oject but Who Did Not Enter the Project

Using this method of selection, thirty-six counties were included as possible locations of children for the project. During the first year of the project, the time period selected for admission, children were admitted to the project from twenty of the thirty-six counties. The map shows the counties eligible for the project; the twenty counties in which children met the eligibility criteria for the project and became part of the project; four counties in which children met the eligibility criteria for the project, but who did not become part of the project because contracts could not be negotiated. In twelve counties, no children who met the project criteria were assigned to workers in the project.

It may be seen from the map that children were admitted to the project from all parts of Iowa.

Characteristics of the Children in Foster Care Project

Table 1. below shows the characteristics of the children in the foster care project by age, sex, legal status and by plan for the future, as seen by the worker at time of intake.

Table 1. Characteristics of Children in the Project at Time of Intake

Characteristic	Total	
	No.	Percent
Sex		
Total	52	100.0
Male	28	54.0
Female	24	46.0
Type of Custody 1/		
Total	52	100.0
Committed to Dept.	2	4.0
Legal Cust.	24	46.0
Vol. Pl.	19	38.0
Emerg. Pl.	6	12.0
Eventual Goal		
Total	52	100.0
Return Home	37	71.1
Indept. Liv.	6	12.0
Adoption	3	5.7
Remain in F.C.	6	12.0

Sex

In our sample, the boys were likely to enter foster care at a younger age than did the girls. This is consistent with finding of previous surveys.

1/ The Department of Social Services has designated four different types of custody, as follows:

1. Commitment to the Department: When a court has committed the child to the Commissioner of Social SErvices or his designee.

2. Legal Custody: When a court has transferred legal custody of the child to the Department of Social Services .

3. Voluntary Placement: When the department has agreed to provide foster care services for the child on the basis of a signed placement agreement between the department and the child's parent or guardian.

4. Emergency Placement: When the child has been placed in emergency care for a period of not more than thirty days upon approval of the commissioner or his designee.

Types of Custody

The pattern is that as the children get older, a larger percentage of those who come into foster care are those for whom the Department has legal custody, and a similar percentage come through voluntary placement. These two categories account for the large majority of children.

In the table on the preceding page, it may be seen that the Department has legal custody for forty-six percent of the children; thirty-eight percent are in voluntary placement, and smaller percentages in emergency placement or committed to the Department.

Where the Department has legal custody, all but two of the children are teenagers. Where there is voluntary placement, more of the children are under age 16. Emergency placement, while only 12% of the children, occurs in all age groups.

Plan for the Future

The plan for the future, as seen by the worker at the time of intake, was for the child to return home in 74% of the cases. The two categories of "independent living" and "remain in foster care" account for 26% of the children. They are grouped together, since they include children whom the worker did not expect to return home. A small percentage was expected to be adopted, rather than to return home.

(See Figure 2. on page 9)

Comparison Group of Children

One of the differences between a research project and a demonstration project is that in the latter, the method being demonstrated is expected to develop and change during the project. In a research project it is expected that the propositions will be set out before the research is undertaken; and once the design is set, there will be no deviation from that design. Ideally, a demonstration project should end with a set of propositions to be tested.

In the development of the application for a grant for the foster care project, there was a great amount of discussion about whether to include

Figure 2. Summary of the Problems of the Children in the Foster Care Project at the Time of Intake, As Perceived by Workers

Problems of the Child

A. Child Neglect
   1. No physical home
   2. No clothes, child dirty, child cold

B. Child Development
   1. Child was behind in development

C. Mental Health & Physical Problems
   1. Suicide attempt
   2. Depression
   3. Alcoholism
   4. Drug use

D. Sexual Problems
   1. Acting out sexually
   2. Illegetimately preg.

E. Problems with the Law
   1. Stealing
   2. Drinking
   3. Picked-up by police
   4. Runaway

F. Emotional Problems
   1. Withdrawn
   2. Extreme acting out behavior
      a. extreme temper tantrums
      b. does not respond to discipline
   3. Unable to relate to peers
   4. Unable to relate to authority figures
   5. manipulative
   6. Does not trust anyone
   7. In need of psychiatric counselling
   8. Fighting & physical abuse of peers

Problems of the Parent

A. Emotional Problems
   1. Immaturity
   2. Emotional Instability
   3. Unable to cope with stress of raising children

B. Marital Problems
   1. Parents separated
   2. In process of divorce
   3. Together, but with marital problems

C. Alcoholism

D. Probation

E. Husband in Jail

Problems of Parent-Child Interaction

↓

A. Parent(s) Unable to Establish Rules and Routine Necessary for Child's Development

B. Child Used as Scapegoat

C. Mother Rejecting of the Child

D. Problems With Step-Parent

E. Physical Abuse

F. Neither Parent Wants Child

a comparison group. Those in the planning group, who were familiar with research but not demonstration, worked on a design that would include a comparison group. However, upon the advice of the regional Director of the U.S. Children's Bureau, we agreed to include only the project group. There were three reasons for this:

1. The difficulty of identifying a true comparison group: It was not possible to use other cases on the same worker's caseload as a control group because workers, once trained in the contract method, would probably use that method with the rest of their cases.

2. The children in the project were not expected to be a sample of all children in foster care, but were limited to those who had the best chance to return home.

3. The children in the project were expected to be older than the children in the general foster care caseload since they had to be old enough to understand a contract in order to be included in the project.

Instead of a control group, it was decided to use a before and after design with a single group. Additionally, there was a strong interest in what happened after a child left foster care. It was recognized that a child might leave foster care, but that the gains she/he made might not hold; therefore, if we included a one-year follow-up period in the design, we would know whether there had been a real change in the situation or whether the child had been removed from foster care prematurely. Therefore, in the design of the project, a one year follow-up was included as the time when the project would end for each child.

When the project was evaluated for continuation for the third and final year, the advisory committee at the U.S. Children's Bureau suggested we include a comparison group. Since we had not included this in the original plan and it would be very laborious to do it at this point, they suggested we try to find a match for twenty-five of the children. The suggestion was accepted and a match was found for the thirty-four children who had completed the one year follow-up by March, 1977.

The method for selecting the matching children was as follows:

1. The source of the names of possible matching children was the computer printouts of all intakes for each month, which were available by county and worker.

2. The counties in which project children lived were excluded as referral sources for comparison group children, to avoid the possibility that the workers of comparison group children would have the special training that the project workers received.

3. The children in the comparison group were selected at the time the one year follow-up period for the project children had ended. Since they were not identified earlier, this had the advantage of avoiding the chance that they would have received special treatment because of their identification as comparison children.

The children in the comparison group were matched to the project children on an individual basis on the following characteristics:

1. The comparison child had to be the same sex as the project child;

2. The comparison child had to be the same age at the time of intake into foster care (within six months) as the project child;

3. The comparison child had to enter foster care from a living situation with at least one natural parent, as did the project child;

4. The intake date for foster care had to be the same (within six months).

The one criterion which was difficult to match was that of coming from a living situation with at least on natural parent. Many of the children, both project and comparison children, were entered into the data processing system as new intakes when the actual situation might be only a change of status, such as a move from one county to another, one foster home to another, change of worker, and so on. That system has since been changed; however, the children in the project and the potential comparison group were admitted under the old record-keeping system and their names were to be found on those lists. The lists had the advantage of being a verifiable source of the date of intake for both groups of children. These records had information about the sex and age of each child, but not whether the child came into foster care from a living situation with at least one biological parent. This meant then telephoning the county from which the child entered foster care, to get the information. It was necessary for a county worker to find the particular intake date in the child's record and to read the circumstances surrounding that intake. In some instances, many records had to be examined to find one child who matched the project child. The older the child was, the more difficult it was to find a matching case. The children age fifteen and older sometimes required as many as ten calls to find a matching case.

Part II

Findings: Comparison of the Project Group and Match Group

Length of Time in Foster Care and Cost of Foster Care

The table below shows that the average number of months in foster care was 7.5 for the children in the project, and 11.7 for those in the match group - a difference of 4 months. The average cost of foster care per child was $1,142 for the children in the project group and $4,649 for those in the match group - a difference of $3,507 per child

Table 2. Comparison of Cost and Length of Stay of Project and Matching Children at the End of the One Year Period After Project Children Left Foster Care.

Measure	Project Children	Match Children
Number of Children	34	34
Average Number of Months In Foster Care	7.5	11.7
Average Cost of Foster Care Per Child	$1,142	$4,649

A more detailed examination of the length of time in foster care shows that about the same number in each group remained in foster care for six months or less, but that once the six months period was passed, the total length of stay was shorter for the project children than for children in the match group.

The table below shows that none of the project children remained in foster care for more than 13 months, while 38% of the match group did.

Table 3. Length of Time in Foster Care of Project and Match Children

	Project Children		Match Children	
Length of Time	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	34	100.0	34	100.0
Six Months or Less	14	41.2	13	38.2
7 - 13 Months	20	58.8	8	23.6
More than 13 Months	-	-	13	38.2

The total cost of foster care for the 34 project children was $93,517, and for the match children, $158,081, a difference of $64,564. (None of the figures include costs of Medicaid, or costs while a child was in an institution or hospital; the costs include maintenance and service.)

Since the children in the project remained in foster care for a shorter period than the children in the match group, it was to be expected that the costs per child would be lower for the children in the project.

The table below shows that the average cost per child in the project was higher for six months or less, but lower for the children who were in for a longer period - because more of the project children were provided with additional services during the early period. The higher costs found for the match group were due to more children being placed in residential treatment facilities. The difference in cost between the two groups suggests that there may be value in spending more money at the initial period of the case in order to prevent long term care hich becomes increasingly expensive. The children for whom the cost of care was greatest were those who were in residential treatment facilities.

Table 4. Cost of Foster Care of Project and Match Children, by Length of Stay in Foster Care

Length of Stay	Project Children		March Children	
	Number Of Cases	Average Cost Per Case	Number Of Cases	Average Cost Per Case
6 Months or Less	14	$2,369	13	$1,502
7 - 13 Months	20	3,018	8	4,248
14 - 20 Months	-	-	7	6,009
21 Months or More	-	-	6	10,417

Assessment of Outcome of Foster Care

In the general measures of outcome, as evaluated by the social worker who worked with the case, the differences were not statistically significant. The greatest difference was in the contact between the parents and the child. This was to be expected since the major thrust of the project was toward improving the relationship between the natural parents and the child.

Table 5. A Comparison of the Outcome for Project and Matching Children At the End of the One Year Period After Project Children Left Foster Care, Based on Social Worker's Judgment

Measure	Project Children	Match Children
Total Number of Children	34	34
Average of Workers Assessment of outcome at the end of the one year follow-up period after project children left foster care: (1 = Very Good; 7 = Bad)		
Contact with mother	3.17	3.51
Contact with father	3.17	4.30
Living Arrangement	2.91	3.25
School or work situation	3.30	3.35
Personal functioning	3.23	3.25
Interaction with peers	3.29	3.26

There were two limitations in the data about the quantitative comparison of the project and the match group.

The evaluation of the child's situation at the end of the one-year follow-up period was made by the worker who carried the case for the project children. For the other group, the case was sometimes still open, in which case the worker could report on the current situation. In other cases, the case was closed and the worker depended on knowledge he had of the case, simply because the family was still in the community; in still other cases, the workers had left and the information was provided by the supervisor. Therefore, the first limitation was that more information was available about the children in the project than about those in the match group.

The second limitation was that the outcome evaluation was based on the worker's judgment. This was related to the worker's individual way of expressing himself. For example, one worker might say that the child was getting along fairly well, and would rate the situation as a "1"; another one would say the child was getting along fairly well and rate the situation as "4". Most workers in both groups avoided the highest and lowest numbers. Therefore, the averages do not show as much difference as they might if measures other than workers' judgment could have been used. However, the workers dealing with both groups of children had the same range of personal expression, so that it is safe to assume that the project children actually did have a slightly more successful outcome as a group than the match children.

It may be noted that there was a greater difference in the three areas: Contact with the natural mother, contact with the natural father, and living arrangements, than in the three areas: School or work situation, personal functioning, and interaction with peers. It was in the former

group that most of the project effort was placed, and apparently the results were reflected in the improved situation in these areas.

Part III.

Findings: Additional Selected Outcomes of Children in the Project; Living Arrangements Following Foster Care for the Children Who Completed The One-Year Follow-Up Period

One element of the project involved predicting the outcome of foster care in terms of the desired living arrangement. A plan was started at the beginning, which included the goal for the living arrangement after foster care, which might be return home, independent living or adoption.

The following table shows the plan at intake, the actual living arrangements immediately following foster care, and the living arrangements at the time of the completion of the one year follow-up period.

Table 6. Living Arrangement Following Foster Care In Relation To Plan At Intake

	Living Arrangement Following Foster Care									
	Parent(s) Home		Foster Care		Independent Living		Other		Total	
Time Periods	No.	Perc.	No.	Perc.	No.	Perc.	No.	Perc.	No.	Perc.
Plan at Intake	27	79.4	2	5.9	5	14.7	-	-	34	100.0
Actual Living Arrangement Immediately Following Foster Care	30	88.2	-	-	3	8.8	1	3.0	34	100.0
Actual Living Arrangement At Time of Completion of One Year Follow-Up Period	24	70.6	1	3.0	4	11.7	5	14.7	34	100.0

The table above shows that the plan for most of the children in the project was to return home, and the plan was achieved.

At the time of the one-year follow-up, the number who were still in their parent(s)' home went down; however, the children who left were primarily the older children. They left to enter the Navy, to get married, and to live with other relatives. One of the young children was placed for adoption. Only one child was again in foster care.

The table does not reflect some of the changes that occurred during the one year follow-up period. Among the older children, there were

three runaway episodes, lasting from a few days to a period of three months during which no one in the project knew the whereabouts of the child. In all three cases, the child returned home. In another case, the child returned home and then went into foster care after nine months, because the home situation was not working out. In another case, the child was at home for six months and then was sent to the Iowa Training School for Boys. There was only one change among the youngest children; in that case the mother agreed to adoption.

It was not possible to compare the situation of the children in the match group because the plan for the outcome following foster care was not recorded.

The changes that occurred during the one year follow-up period reflect both the importance of the home in the child's future, and the dynamic nature of the children's lives. Regardless of the circumstances of the home, there is a tie in the families of the project children that overrides other considerations. Although the child may run away, he does come back. The findings provide support, if support is needed, for the notion that the family should be given the highest priority in the work with foster children.

The Children Who Did Not Complete the One-Year Follow-Up Period

At the end of the project period, there were 18 children who had not completed the one year follow-up period. For the most part, their situations were similar to those who did complete the one-year follow-up; however, the difference was that the latter group entered the project later. This was due to the fact that the workers in the project were not assigned cases that fit the project requirements as rapidly as had been anticipated.

Of the 18 children, twelve were out of foster care and six were not. The living arrangement and average length of stay may be seen in the table below:

Table 7. Living Arrangement at End of the Project Period and Length of Stay in Foster Care and Children Who Did Not Complete the One-Year Follow-Up Period

Living Arrangement At End of Project Period	Number of Children	Average Length of Stay in Foster Care At End of Period
Total	18	-
Out of Foster Care	12	14.8 Mo.
Living with 1 or both Parents	8	
Living with Relatives	2	
Living in Adoption Homes	2	
In Foster Care	6	
Living in Residential Treatment Center	3	
Living In Foster Care	3	

For this group of children, the goal stated at intake was that half of the children would return home and the other half, be placed in some other living arrangement. The outcome may be seen on the table below.

Table 8. Goal and Outcome of Project Children Who Did Not Complete The One Year Follow-Up Period

		Outcome				
Living Arrangement	Goal	Return Home	Living With Relatives	M.H. Inst.	Remain In Foster Care	Adoption
Return Home	9	7	-	?	-	-
Remain in Foster Care	5	1	2	-	2	-
Adoption	3	-	-	-	-	3
Independent Living	1	-	-	1	-	-

It may be seen from the table above that ten of the 18 children, or a little more than half had achieved the stated goal by the end of the project period.

Part IV - The Work With The Natural Parents

A major component of the project was that of work with the natural parents, which was seen as a way to achieve the appropriate outcome for the children in the project following the foster care experience. While the project focused on foster care, the workers tried to prevent foster care where possible. As Jenkins and Norman (1967) [1] found in their study, the number of families for whom foster care is the ideal treatment may be a small proportion of the total number of families who become involved in the placement situation. The involvement of the parents in the project from the beginning was considered crucial; first, in reaching a decision regarding the advisability of placement; and second, in establishing a firm foundation for the ongoing work with the parents and the child.

Based on this philosophy, two of the criteria for admission to the project were that the child come from a living situation with at least one natural parent and that the parent(s) be available for at least one interview. In some cases this resulted in a decision not to place the child, and to have further contact with the natural family in a counselling relationship.

If the decision was made that the child would enter foster care, the parents were involved in the negotiation of a contract. Some of the specific matters included in the contract with the parents were:

1. An agreement relating to the explicit details of the child's relationship with the parents during the time of foster care. This included such things as frequency of visits (in some

[1] Shirley Jenkins, "Duration of Foster Care: Some Relevant Antecedent Variables", Child Welfare, XLVI, 8 (1967), 450-455.

cases no visiting for a specified period of time), place of visits, method of arranging contact, definition of the role of other family members in the child's life, identification of family members who might be resources, method of revising the contract, and other specific matters;

2. An agreement relating to the parent's work on his/her own problems (problems for which the parent would be the identified recipient, such as job training, health care).

The general emphasis of the work with the parents was on identifying the strengths of the parents and on helping them to resolve their problems sufficiently to improve the parent-child relationship, enhance their potential for parenting and, where possible, reunite the child with the parents.

There was a difference in the perceptions of the parents and the worker about the problems which were of concern at the time of intake. The table below shows the difference in priority attached to the problems in the two groups:

Table 9: Perception of Workers and by Mothers of Problems at the Time of Intake

Mother's Perception		Worker's Perception	
Rank	Problem Area	Rank	Problem Area
1	Housekeeping	1	Sense of personal adequacy
2	Ability to budget funds	2	Protection of the child
3	Personal appearance	3	Level of anxiety
4	Continuity of Employment	4	Emotional maturity
5	Sense of personal adequacy	5	Social outlets
6	Level of anxiety	6	Emothional health
7	Physical health	7	Continuity of employment
8	Physical care of the child	8	Ability to budget funds
9	Possession of skills for employment	9	Physical care of the child
		10	Physical health
10	Emotional health	11	Possession of skills for employment
11	Social outlets		
12	Emotional maturity	12	Interest in child
13	Interest in the child	13	Personal appearance
14	Protection of the child	14	Housekeeping

The most important problems perceived by the mothers related to tangible matters. The two problems mentioned at least important were frequently the main reason seen by the workers as causing the child to enter foster care. The worker's perception of the problem centers on the protection of the child and the dynamics of the mother, with least importance placed on the tangible problems of personal appearance and housekeeping.

The workers stated the goals agreed upon at the time of the first contract. The goals focusing on the relationship with the child dealt with accepting the child, establishing communication with the child,

establishing a trusting relationship with the child, and having contact with the child. Those goals relating to specific problems of child rearing included using appropriate discipline, allowing the child independence, setting limits, and improving child management. The goals relating to the parent's own problems included getting psychiatric help, working on marital problems, and working more effectively with other members of the extended family.

The specific services provided to the natural parents were identified for thirty-seven of the project children, twenty-one of whom have completed the one year follow-up and sixteen who have not. It may be seen in the table below that the most frequest service profided by workers is counselling, followed by "home management/functional education" and "assessment services".

The service called "counselling" was used most frequently by the workers to describe what occurred between them and their clients. It is most closely related to the interactionist view of social work in which:

> "a self-realizing, energy-producing client with certain tasks to perform and a professional with a specific function to carry out engage each other as interdependent actors within an organic system...and both sets of tasks - the client's and the worker's - change from moment to moment. The interactionists emphasize experience and effect, step-by-step processes, and situational...descriptions of people in difficulty...The interactionists see the social work function as one of mediating the often troubled transactions between people and the various systems through which they carry out their relationships with society - the family, peer group, social agency, neighborhood, school, job, and others." 2/

The other services identified are defined in the Iowa Service Reporting System and are used to report worker activity. Among these, the most frequently identified service is that of "home management/functional education", which is defined as:

> "Supportive and/or environmental casework services, including but not limited to: Formal or informal instructions and training in management of household budgets; maintenance and care of the home, preparation of food, nutrition, consumer education, child rearing, and health maintenance; socialization and stimulation to improve functioning in daily living, to open new ways of self-improvement, and to compensate for lack of formal education." 3/

The following table shows the services provided by workers to the project children, and shows that the general effort expended with the parents was similar, whether or not the child completed the one-year follow-up period. The table shows the percentage of parents in each group who received a particular service. For example, among the 21 children in the group who completed the one-year follow-up period, 80.9% received

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2/ Encyclopedia of Social Work 1971 (New York: National Association of Social Workers, 1971), pp. 1256-57.

3/ Iowa Department of Social Services Employees' Manual, XIV-A-51 (Des Moines: June 22, 1976)

counselling from another agency. It would be possible for the same parent to receive counselling from more than one person or agency. In the other group, the situation was almost identical.

Table 10. Services to Natural Parents of Children in the Project By Percent

Services	Children Who Completed The One Year Follow-Up Period (21 Children)* Services Provided By:			Children Who Did Not Complete the One Year Follow-up Period (16 Children)* Services Provided By:		
	Worker	Other DSS Worker	Other Agency	Worker	Other DSS Worker	Other Agency
Counselling	80.9	14.2	38.0	81.2	18.7	37.5
Home Management/Functional Education	47.6	14.2	19.0	50.0	6.2	12.5
Mental Health Services	4.7	4.7	52.3	-	6.2	31.2
Protective Services	42.8	4.7	-	12.5	-	-
Assessment Services	33.3	-	9.5	50.0	12.5	18.7
Employment Services	14.2	4.7	19.0	12.5	-	6.2
Housing Services	23.8	4.7	9.5	6.2	-	-
Transportation	28.5	4.7	4.7	31.2	-	-
Family Planning	19.0	4.7	9.5	12.5	-	-
Medical Services	28.5	4.7	-	6.2	-	12.5
Legal Services	-	-	19.0	12.5	-	18.7
Alcoholism Dependency Serv.	-	-	14.2	12.5	-	18.7
Homemaker Services	4.7	4.7	4.7	6.2	-	-
Residential Treatment Serv.	4.7	-	9.5	6.2	-	6.2
Alternative Living Arrangement	9.5	-	-	31.2	-	12.5
Chare Services	-	-	4.7	-	-	-
Emergency Caretake Services	4.7	-	-	6.2	-	-

*Not all workers provided the information.

Combining the service to biological parents in the two groups, the frequency of services may be seen in the following table.

Table 11. Summary of Services Provided to Natural Parents, by Frequency

Rank	Service
1	Counselling
2	Home Management/Functional Education
3	Assessment Services
4	Mental Health Services
5	Transportation
6	Protective Services
7	Employment Services
8	Alternate Living Arrangement
9	Medical Services
10	Legal Services
11	Family Planning
12	Housing Services
13	Alcoholism Dependency Services
14	Residential Treatment Services
15	Homemaker Services
16	Emergency Caretaker Services
17	Chore Services

The contact with the biological parents was maintained by personal visits, telephone calls, and letters and other contact.

The following two examples illustrate the kind of work which was done with two of the parents whose children were under age 13 when they were admitted to the project.

Case #27 Billy E. Age at intake: 5

Billy was placed in foster care by his mother as a voluntary placement His mother was rejecting the child and was unable to decide whether to parent her child or to release him for adoption. Billy was behind in development.

The worker's goal was to help the mother see the need of the child for a permanent living situation, with either return home or release. The mother was in great conflict about whether to keep or release Billy. She was under pressure from her family and could not make a decision.

The progression of events over the following months was:

November, 1975 — Mother came in and talked freely about not waning Billy back ever. The worker discussed release, but mother was not willing.

December, 1975 — Mother is satisfied with Billy's foster care and dislikes facing question of permanent plans.

January, 1976 — Following a request from the foster mother to remove Billy, mother made a plan for Billy to live with his maternal grandparents permanently. The worker focused on helping

	mother stand by permanent plan for Billy.
February, 1976	The mother is contented with Billy's placement and feels less guilt than before. She says she seldom sees him and wants to leave him with her parents permanently. Worker focused on supporting mother in feeling positive about herself.
May, 1976	Mrs. E. (Billy's mother) talks freely with worker but does not actively seek help. She feels inadquate to care for Billy but is not satisfied with her parents' care and feels they lack discipline. She visits Billy regularly in her parents' home. She is waivering about bringing Billy home as she feels he is not doing well in school.
June, 1976	Billy's mother visits often and is less rejecting when she does not have responsibility for him.
July, 1976	Billy's mother is uncertain but feels she may want Billy back when she gets settled.
September, 1976	Billy is with is mother. Diane (Billy's mother) has been much more positive and relaxed. She comes often for support. Worker's focus was on: "Be available for crisis; help her see Billy positively; and reward her great improvement in dicipline and child care."
October, 1976	Mother wants constant help with questions about Billy, with housing, with school problems, with transportation. Worker's focus was on: "Give mother all the support needed until she can cope alone. Make reference to parenting classes which just began.
November, 1976	Mrs. E. is now very receptive to mental health evaluation and homemaker services. Billy is having behavior problems at school and home, which health nurse feels may be organic in cause. The mother is willing to work this out at home.

Case #10 Donnie H. Age at Intake: 5

Donnie was placed in foster care as an emergency placement, with legal custody assigned to the Department of Social Services. His mother was indicted and convicted of forgery; diagnosed character disorder; no physical home - living in and out of truck between

stays with relatives; no clothes or food for the children; Donnie not attending school.

The goals stated at the time of intake were for the mother to get emotionally and medically straight; psychiatric counselling; establish a home and maintain it; make decision about the father.

The progression of events over the following months was:

November, 1975	Mother working on G.E.D., cooperating with probation. Taught mother specific housekeeping and money management practices. Father followed through on securing medical insurance, rearranging financial affairs, and taking responsibility for parenting.
December, 1975	Worker's focus was on making clear, consistent expectations on parents for management of Donnie and follow-through.
January, 1976	Mother very manipulative of worker, lawyer, all people involved; finally went to the doctor and found she's pregnant; moved without permission; not completing probation or G.E.D.: Didn't make travel arrangements for Donnie's visit; didn't want to let child go back.
February, 1976	Worker's focus was on mother being a parent, not a sister to Donnie. Work on other conditions to stabilize living situation.
March, 1976	Donnie's parents have become much more cooperative with the agency and are following through with their parts of our contract. They have been seeking out medical insurance, checking with school teachers, and trying to finish the filing of bankruptcy papers. They have become more interested in Donnie.
April, 1976	Donnie's father developed an acute pneumonia and was placed in the hospital for about a week. Fortunately, his medical insurance covered, and I am very glad I stuck to my part of the contract which dealt with medical insurance because, typically in the past, Donnie's father would have left his family so that they could go on Aid to Dependent Children when he experienced a loss of income and hospitalization. This time the hospitalization was covered even though he did lose the income from the month. I encouraged the family to apply for food stamps, which they did, since their income was so much lower.

May, 1976	Two major problems were discussed with Donnie's parents this month. I worked very closely with the homemaker to have her assist Donnie's mother, since the mother was getting behind and also to support the mother in obtaining good medical care and possibly to take some of the pressure off of her. The second major problem has to do with mother's uncle who has been staying with the H.'s. Each month they say the uncle would leave but he continues to stay there and take up the boy's bedroom. I encouraged Donnie's parents to be straight with me and if the uncle is not leaving to work out more appropriate sleeping arrangements.
June, 1976	Donnie's mother has been at University Hospitals. Since she has been isolated and alone, she has regressed into her manipulative tactics she used when I first met her. Father is showing much frustration and exhaustion in trying to keep his family together. He threatened to leave the whole family and forget all of this mess. I was able to assist him to work through those feelings and renew his commitment to his children and wife.
August, 1976	The worker's focus was on continuing to support both parents' efforts to become better parents. They are both well motivated to make their family work.
September, 1976	This month we dealt with odds and ends - seeing that the mother attended the Head Start parents' meeting, arranging for a homemaker to be there for that meeting and when needed. The family has stabilized much more, concentrated on getting along financially and developing relationships with others

The following is an example of the kind of contract developed with the H. family relating to visits of the biological parents while the child was in foster care:

"VISITATION CONTRACT"

This is an agreement between Mr. and Mrs. Foster Parents, Mr. and Mrs. Natural Parents, and Ms. Worker of the County Department of Social Services. It was formed on August 14, 1975, to clear up any misunderstandings in regard to visits in the future between the Foster Parents and the Natural Parents.

1. It is understood that Foster Parents will be free to take the boys out of state when necessary. If it is for overnight, Ms. Worker will be informed and the County will know where they can be reached. There is one exception to this which will be from August 21st until the 25th, 1975, when the Foster Parents will be taking their daughters to Blank College in Other State. Hereafter, they will notify County where they can be reached during out of state visits and notify county dates and times they will be gone.

2. Dale and Sharon Natural Parents will be expected to pay a parent's responsibility assigned to them. This includes $27.20 for August, 1975 on. Mr. and Mrs. Natural Parents will make up payments of $35.30 for May, June and July. This has been agreed upon that this additional payment of $35.00 will be made up by November 1, 1975. If the financial responsibility is taken care of, the privilege of visiting the boys will be permitted.

   Visits will also depend on the way in which Mr. and Mrs. Natural Parent conduct visits with their children. It is expected that they will not upset the children unusually, but that they will enjoy the children, see that their meals are taken care of as well as other responsibilities for bathing them, keeping their clothes clean, etc. With the above two conditions met, financially and emotionally, the boys will be allowed to visit as arranged through the County Department of Social Services. Again, no visits can be arranged through foster parents and natural parents, but only through the Department.

3. It will be expected that the Natural Parents notify the County Department of Social Services at least a week before they would like to visit. Tentatively the Foster Parents intend to make one visit in September. If everything is going well, we will plan that Mr. Foster Parent will bring Donnie with him and he will spend from September 23 through the 27th with the Natural Parents. They understand that they may have to pick him up in Next Town and return him to Next Town for this visit.

4. All expenses on visits will be Natural Parents' responsiblity, including gas, shelter, food and entertainment.

5. It is planned that the children will spend Thanksgiving with Natural Parents in their home. If Foster Parents can meet them part way when they come to pick them up, it will be appreciated, but it is not necessary. Christmas is tentatively planned that the Natural Parents will have the boys from school vaction to the 27th and that Foster Parents will have them the last part of the vacation. It is understood that these visits are tentative and flexible in case of storms, etc. Again when the boys are in the parents' home it is expected that the parents will remain in their home, will feed them, take care of them as any parents are expected to do.

6. It is understood that Mr. and Mrs. Natural Parents are free to write to their sons (or draw pictures) as often as they wish. It is also understood that some calls will be permitted but on a limited basis with the Foster Parents knowing beforehand.

All parties signing this contract have read and understood its contents and agree to comply with its expectations.

Signed by: Natural Mother, Natural Father, Foster Mother, Foster Father and Worker.

The two examples show the nature of the involvement with the Natural families, as reported briefly by the workers on a monthly basis. The workers were asked to describe the advantages and disadvantages of their work with the parents after the children returned home. Their answers ranged from feeling that the supportive relationship was seen as helpful by both worker and client,to the parents were unwilling to continue any contact with the worker after the children returned home. The workers saw the followig two advantages of their continued contact:

1. Help with the transition from the foster home to the parent(s)' home. This included helping the family to readjust to being together and providing support until a stable level of everyday living was achieved.

2. Prevention of the need for foster care in the future. This included enabling the family to deal with problems before they got out of hand - responding to danger signals.

The workers also saw a danger in their continued contact as that of fostering dependency, so that problems that could have been dealt with by the family were left to the worker to solve. The other problem, mentioned less frequently by the workers, was that the worker might invade the client's privacy or be considered a "watch-dog" by the client.

Workers in the project were required to continue with the family after the child returned home; the usual Department of Social Services practice does not require this. Workers are permitted to provide services as long as they are appropriate. The Workers' Manual (Iowa Department of Social Services, November, 1976) states:

> "A particular service may be terminated whenever the specified problem appears to be solved or whenever, after sustained efforts, it is evident that the family or individual is unable to profit from the service or is unwilling to accept further service..."

The policy, although negatively stated, permits the provision of services. However, in the implementation of the policy, based on the project workers' experience, after a child leaves foster care, the workers find many other priorities for their time, particularly if the family situation to which the child returns does not show immediate problems. The workers' consensus is that increased attention should be paid to the nature of service provided after foster care, and that this requires planning for workloads which permit continuing service to a greater extent than is now in practice.

Work With Natural Parents: Summary

1. More emphasis was placed on the work with natural parents than on the work with foster parents.

2. More emphasis was placed on understanding and dealing with the natural parents than had been the pattern before the project.

3. The contact with natural parents was maintained by personal visits, telephone calls and letters.

4. The workers found that natural parents would keep in contact with the workers even when they moved out of town or even out of state, when they understood that the worker was interested in helping the natural family work out the best plan for the child.

5. The workers found that parents who were not interested in caring for their child were willing to participate in planning for their care.

6. The workers generally found more strengths in the natural parents than they expected to find.

7. The workers saw their involvement with the family as helpful in providing a transition from foster care to the return home and to prevention of the need for additional foster care.

8. The workers saw disadvantages in their continued contact with the families as making the families more dependent and as invading their privacy, but saw more advantage in the contact.

9. The workers perceived that the workers and the natural parents had a difference in definition of the problem at the time of intake.

10. The most frequently provided services to parents included counselling, home-management, functional education and assessment services.

11. The more emphasis is placed on working with the natural parents, the less the chance that the child will be placed in foster care.

12. The project showed instances where a child and/or the natural family could find other resources for his care within the family, such as living with an older sibling, a married sibling or the grandparents.

Part V - The Work With The Foster Family

The effort to improve the effectiveness of foster care by the use of the contract required that the job of the foster parents be carefully delineated. The goal of the foster care project was to increase the chances of each child in foster care to achieve the appropriate outcome following his foster care experience. The emphasis on the outcome made clear at the beginning of the Department's expectation that foster

care would be a temporary condition. The project worker took the responsibility for four conditions in relation to the work of the foster parents:

1. The worker took responsibility for conveying to the foster parents the agency's child rearing philosophy;

2. The worker took the responsibility for developing an agreement with the foster parents so the foster parents would know what was expected of them and what they could expect from the agency;

3. The foster parents were to be viewed as paraprofessionals employed by the agency; and

4. Specific details were expected to be worked out between the foster parents and the worker in relation to frequency and type of communication and other pertinent matters.

The early record of the contact between the foster family and the worker was kept in the form of a check-list dealing with the subjects discussed. The records showed that the focus of the contact between the worker and the foster parents fell in five general categories, in the following order of importance:

1. Maintaining contact with the agency - This included development of appropriate expectations for each other, providing information about unexpected changes, and general communication patterns.

2. Understanding visiting plans - This included scheduling of visits between child and natural parents, and notification of changes in visiting plans.

3. Foster-Parent-Child Conflict Resolution - This included implementation of behavior controls, and tasks assigned regarding management of the child.

4. Education focus on understanding the child's needs, promotion of the child's development.

5. Focus on emotional support.

Later the records were expanded to permit some narrative of the interaction between the worker and the foster parents. These records showed some instances where the foster care experience was in keeping with the goals of the contract, and others which did not.

In the following example, the decision for the child to return home was made with the satisfaction of all the parties:

> "Today Clint, his parents, foster parents, school counselor and my supervisor met for a staffing to discuss Clint's return home. Clint and his family feel they have achieved the goals which defined when Clint first moved into the C. foster home. The C's also felt that Clint has achieved much success in school and in personal relationships, and they feel it is time for him to return

home. Mr. T., his cousellor gathered information about school progress. His teachers' remarks indicated Clint has improved greatly. I see that Clint has a much more positive attitude toward himself and maybe more important, his parents have a more positive attitude about him, specifically his mother. Clint wants to go back home now and his parents want him home. His foster parents and my supervisor and I agree that this is a realistic request. Therefore, Clint will go home this weekend. He knows the C's will continue contact and I will continue to assess this move into his home and his achievements in school."

In some other cases, the foster parents did not want the child to leave or did not know how to help prepare for the child's departure. In the case of Michele, for example, in December:

"(There was) open communication about goal for Michele.

January	Foster parents beginning to disengage themselves from Michele
February	Foster parents feeling happy for Michele going home - sad they're losing her. They are questioning the possible success of a move home.
March	They think a mistake is being made, Michele is not ready to go home. They are having a hard time accepting decision of Michele, her mom and me."

Some other problems which occurred are illustrated with excerpts from the record. These include:

1. Problems of the foster parents' need to accomplish their own goals:

Ex. Karen S.	"11/75:	They feel a sense of failure because Karen not doing better - not able to accept the differences in them.
	12/75	Foster parents pretty disillusioned. Foster mother more open to new ideas than foster father.
	1/76	Foster parents want Karen out - not dealing with their feelings.
	2/76	Terminated - Foster parents are wanting a rest and will probably consider taking adolescents on a short term basis."

2. Unanticipated problem as a result of taking a foster Child:

(resulted in three moves for the foster child, within two months.)

Andrea B.:	"3/75	T's will take Andrea.
	4/75	Things going well. Children have adjusted to schedule of T. home. Two home visits. All O.K.
	5/75	T's desire to terminate foster care. Mrs. T. wants to continue her education. informed Mrs. T. of date for moving and preplacement.
	6/75	Mrs. P. called. Andrea and the two children Mrs. P. keeps in the summer aren't getting along well. Mrs. P. desires termination of placement. Mrs. K. will take Andrea

3. Problems of the worker not satisfied with the treatment when the child was in a facility operated by another agency. In the case of Craig, the worker perceived a case of possible drift, over a seventeen month period:

5/76	I've been pushing B. to push Craig to examine his life more and vent anger better, but they probably won't
6/76	Team meeting held. I urged to B. to dig deeper into Craig's defenses, but they probably won't.
7/76	Continued open communication, although B. still, in my opinion doesn't push Craig enough.
8/76	Same
9/76	Same
10/76	I pushed B. to try to do some behavior mod things with Craig - they resisted.
11/76	I'm disgusted that they don't do much for this kid, but I can't do anything really to budge them.
12/76	Same
1/77	Same
2/77	I still feel that B. isn't providing enough for what we're paying them.
3/77	Somewhat better. Craig has been moved to another unit, which is meeting his needs more and shows some responsiveness by B."

In the case of Craig, a fourteen year old boy, was placed in B. agency because of his personality or emotional problems. The eventual goal was for Craig to return home. The B. agency was selected because it was considered preferable to a family foster home. The number of facilities for Craig was limited.

Because so much emphasis was placed on the work with natural parents, the work with foster parents was given less attention. Ordinarily a great deal of time is invested in support for the foster parents, with very little attention to the natural parents. In the foster care project, it became apparent that the workers felt they knew how to deal with foster parents and did not need a contract.

Workers felt that when they licensed the homes they arrived at a clear understanding of the relationship, and in most cases did not attempt a formal contract about matters other than payment.

The workers discussed their dealing with foster parents, at the final workers' meeting. They felt that some of the problems they ran into could not be helped by a contract. For example, often they licensed a home that was good for one kind of child but they were forced to use it for another kind of child, because it was the only home available, or the placement had to be made so quickly that an adequate study could not be made. In general, the project experience showed that the contract was more often a verbal understanding than a firm agreement.

The Work With the Foster Parents: Summary

1. The workers did not use the contract with foster parents except in special situations, particularly when there was a problem about visiting plans.

2. The workers felt their contact with the foster parents at the time of licensing gave them and the foster parents a clear understanding of each other's role.

3. The workers felt the problems in foster care were caused mainly by placing a child in a home that was not suitable because they didn't have enough choice in making the placement. They needed more foster homes.

Part VI - The Impact of the Project on the Workers and on Their Associates

One of the key elements in the project was the training of workers. The project involved the use of a service contract as a method of increasing the chances of each child in foster care to achieve an appropriate outcome. Because many interpretations of the contract had been used, it was necessary to train all the workers who were to participate in the project about the use of the contract for the project. This meant selecting the workers before selecting the children.

A list was made of all workers who entered a child into the social service system in August 1974. The list was arranged in random order.

The workers for each of the children was contacted by the project director. The purpose of the project was explained. The workers were asked whether they were willing to participate. It was explained that the project would involve additional time. The specific responsibilities that were anticipated for the workers were: To keep special records for the project; to participate in training for the project; and to meet with other workers involved in the project when necessary or beneficial.

The benefit to the worker was stated as a chance to participate in a special project which would provide needed information for the field of foster care. It was made clear that no worker would be required to participate, and no explanation would be required if the worker chose not to participate.

In the process of recruitment of workers for the project, the project director spoke with seventy-four workers who were carrying foster care cases. Of the number , forty-eight workers (65%) volunteered to become part of the project, and twenty-six workers chose not to be in the project (35%).

An important part of the project was to demonstrate the use of the contract for foster care, using workers who were regular employees, with the usual kinds of caseloads, usual pressures, and typical caseloads, so that if the project was successful in its outcome, it would not be because the workers were working under ideal conditions.

A comparison of the two groups, project workers and non-participants in the project, revealed that there were similarities between the two groups in job classification, average size of caseload, and length of experience as employees of the Department of Social Services.

The median caseload size for workers in both groups was 41-50, with 11 to 15 foster care cases.

The workers in the project represented the entire range of workers in length of experiences as Department of Social Services Workers.

The median length of experience as Department of Social Services employees was between 37 and 48 months. Slightly more workers had less than 37 months of experience than had more than 48 months of experience.

The median length of experience as foster care workers was between 25 and 36 months. Three workers reported no previous experience as foster care workers.

Thirty-five workers had direct supervision of casework service; 9 did not.

<u>The Importance of Continuing Staff Development Activities on a Regular Basis.</u>

Originally it had been planned to have only one two-day meeting of all the workers in the project, at the beginning.

Two consultants were employed for the training - Joanne Mermelstein and Paul Sundet, from the School of Social Work, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri. The response of the workers to the two day training session was that they wanted to meet again in three months and discuss their situations after they had some experience. The workers were enthusiastic about the training, which focused on the contract as the basic commitments made in working with clients. During the three years of the project, seven two-day sessions were held.

The first training session for workers included the following topics: Social work practice as framework for contract: Value base, scientific method, definition, nature and types of contract; foundation knowledge for contracting process: Role, relationship; intervention strategy; the process of contracting: Who, why, what, when, where, how; the techniques of contracting: Natural family, foster family, child.

The second training session included a review of contract principles, small group analysis of problems in foster care using case materials; contracting problems with foster parents: Entry, termination; administrative aspects of projects; contracting problems with natural parents: Sanction and auspices, assessment, developing a plan; contrasting problems with children: Starting the relationship, choice of treatment strategy.

Later workshops dealt with other aspects of social treatment, including theory of social intervention, techniques of social treatment, sustaining social treatment, and the impact of social treatment on the workers; crisis intervention; family dynamics; rural community; and other topics in which the workers expressed special interest.

In evaluating the first meeting, it became clear than in order to continue the education of the workers and to keep up the enthusiasm for the project, there should be a meeting every three months.

The training has been planned to enable the workers to fulfill the specific conditions necessary for the project. However, the continuing education included basic social work education. The workshops provided the opportunity for role playing and new learning in a situation which provided support and acceptance. The workers had a chance to role play the situations they would be encountering with their cases, group discussions with their peers, with the opportunity to integrate their learning. The workers received both the intellectual and emotional supports that are essential to implementation of the material discussed.

After the first meeting the schedule was rearranged to permit the workers to have an unstructured informal evening meeting. Those meetings were attended by almost all of the workers each time. At these meetings workers shared experiences and benefited from dealing together with issues that arise in the course of their daily work and for which they all provided social work service.

In addition to meetings with workers, five meetings were scheduled for supervisors.

Before the project began, supervisors and area administrators were thoroughly briefed and their imput sought on both design and training content. This provided a line legitimation for both the project director and the trainers. Additionally, the supervisors meetings covered the

same topics as the workers' meetings but were approached from the stance of how the supervisors could help the workers integrate the materials. The meetings also dealt with the role and function of supervision.

Thirty-five supervisors attended one or more of the training sessions.

The supervisors in the project had a wide variety of other duties in addition to supervision of the project worker. Some were county directors, who had administrative and service responsibilities; some were family service consultants. Very few of them had responsibilities limited to casework supervision. Most of them attended more than one session; the exceptions were those whose duties were changed or where they did not have a worker who had a project case. The general verbal feedback was that the supervisors enhanced their skills because of the training and they could adapt the learning to their work in general.

As important as continuity of training content was to the building of both worker competence and morale, the continuity of trainers was equally a factor. The workers and trainers became a "group" in both psychological and sociological sense of that term and this contibuted markedly to both the trainers' efficiency and the effectiveness of the educational process.

The two trainers increased the level of the education, and by the end of the project, expressed the opinion that the project workers could deal as well with their cases as could the graduate students in the School of Social Work Program.

The contract as the basic commitment was the philosophy that permeated the training. As each workshop proceeded, such as that on crisis intervention or social work with rural families, the instructor would stop periodically and say "Now, isn't that contract?" It was this view, that contract was simply good social work practice, that was meaningful to workers. Such things as crisis intervention could amplify social work practice, but the basic stance was that of generalist social work.

Impact of the Training Beyond the Workers Immediately Involved in the Project

Traditionally, training in public welfare has been generally provided at the time of employment. In the research project, in contrast, the training was ongoing. The training was directed at helping workers with their caseloads, providing something they could use in the day to day work.

In addition, the workers received material which they could take back and share with other workers in their home office. They received recognition for their work when they got back, which also provided support. Because of their increased knowledge, and the opportunity to share it, project workers have benefitted in the whole area of professional development.

Most of the workers have shared the knowledge they have gained, with workers of others not in the project in the following ways: They have presented some of the contract material at district service workers' meetings; have discussed the material with their supervisors; they have helped area service supervisors prepare sessions on contracting for the area service workers; they have participated in in-service training; and have used their knowledge during discussions in the office, at coffee breaks, by sharing notes and using examples of contracting.

The workers who became supervisors will share the knowledge gained in the project with the workers they supervise. An example of the value they saw in the training may be seen in the request by Larry Harvey, who wrote:

> "I have recently been promoted and transferred to the Jefferson County office where I will be a supervisor. If it is possible, I would request to remain in the project."

The Relationship Between the Training and Worker Turnover in the Department of Social Services

One of the expectations in public welfare is that there will be worker turnover. During the 2 1/2 years of the project, 16 workers left the project. Three of the workers left the Deparment to return to school; two because of illnes or maternity; three for other jobs. Six were promoted to supervisor within the Department, and two dropped out because their caseloads included only children who were mentally retarded and would be going to institutions. This represents a 33% loss of workers, which had been anticipated. However, six of the workers who left the project remained with the Department, and moved upward, which reduces the loss to 20%.

The workers in the project are, for the most part, persons who have a special reason for being in the county where they work. Most of them are women whose husbands have jobs in the county and who have grown up in that area. Some of them have remained at the Social Worker II level because they prefer to stay in that area. Of the six persons who were promoted to supervisor, five are men. The sixth is located in Des Moines, where there is opportunity for advancement without leaving the geographical area.

Since most of the workers in the project are Social Worker II's and are not mobile, the opportunity for continuing education and upgrading of skills is especially important. Most of them placed great value on the opportunity for learning which was provided by the project. They felt it was a most unusual experience and many expressed that it was the first time the Department of Social Services appeared to care about them and their development as social workers. They felt the training was relevant to the work they were doing; this was reflected in their excellent attendance and their eagerness to participate.

The implication from the experience in the project is that the workers on the line in most Iowa counties and probably in other rural communities in the U.S., are not a mobile group. They carry the important day to day activities with some help from consultants but have little opportunity for continuing education. It is worth the investment of time and money to upgrade their skills, since this is reflected in reduced cost and better service to clients. The implications are for more applied staff development programs. This reduction in costs was documented for project cases. However, other reduction in costs may be assumed from changes in workers' case loads. For example, in August, 1976, Dale Carter, a project worker, reported that he then had 2 cases in foster care in comparison with 16 cases a year earlier. His explanation of the change was that the major factor was his own change in philosophy. He is now more willing to work more with the natural family than he was previously; this has accounted for fewer childern being placed in foster care.

Worker Turnover at Other Levels

It is especially interesting to compare the turnover among workers with the turnover in the planning group. Those persons in the planning group were at a higher level in the organization and were a more mobile group both geographically and professionally.

The first meeting of the planning group was the result of conferences between the foster care specialist and the project director. They selected persons whom they knew to have a special interest in the subject of foster care. The group included two persons from staff development, four supervisors of foster care workers, and one person from the Office of Planning and Programming. That group put together the first plan for the project.

By the second meeting, six months later, three of the original group were not available; two had left the agency, and the third did not have time available because of his other responsibilities. Before the end of the year after the project was started officially, the planning group was reduced to three persons - the foster care specialist, the project director and a supervisor who was located in Des Moines.

By that time, the project had entered a different stage, and this time, two workers in the project, a supervisor and the protective service specialist were added to the project planning group, now called the Steering Committee. These persons were called together to meet with Bernice Kennedy, of the U.S. Children's Bureau, who was making a site visit regarding the project.

The main responsibility for the project was assigned to the project director, who worked closely with the foster care specialist. Other persons were involved in the development of the project, but most of them had other assignments and were minimally involved after the project started. Of the persons who attended the first meeting, only one was in the project a year later. That person had changed jobs but was still in the Department of Social Services and still located in Des Moines. The foster care specialist had been assigned to a different Division.

The responsibility for the project was left entirely to the project director, although all of the workers and supervisors in the project were eager to be involved in talking through plans, problems and programs.

Most of the persons in the original planning group remained with the Department of Social Services, although their jobs no longer permitted their involvement in the project. However, the mobility of the planning group provides a sharp contrast to that of the line workers and emphasizes the value of continuing education for skills which the line worker will use in dealing with clients.

The Workers Themselves: - Summary

1. The workers in most of the counties are a fairly non-mobile group. They may be expected to remain in the counties where they are located and if they move, to stay in the area. Therefore training of workers should have long term payoff.

2. The workers recognize the value of continuing education when it is directed to upgrading their skills in dealing with clients.

3. The more the training emphasizes the natural family, the more likely the workers will be to use this alternative rather than foster care.

4. Workers in the counties need ongoing reinforcement about the strengths of the family in order to deal with the latent hosility toward the family in the small community where the family may be known as inadequate.

Recommendations for Research

Based on the experience in the foster care demonstration project two areas of research appear to offer promise: (1) Additional emphasis on the work with natural parents; and (2) training for workers in the counties.

Because the workers in the counties are primarily a non-mobile group, for whom social work with clients is the career level they have chosen, a structured social work continuing education program is recommended which should have the following characteristics:

1. It should focus on knowledge, skills and motivation for social work practice.

2. It should provide an incremental progression in which each unit is built upon what the worker already knows.

3. The worker should be helped to integrate the knowledge.

If such a program is introduced, the following propositions may be tested:

1. There is a direct relationship between structured continuing education for social workers in rural counties and reduction of the number of children admitted to foster care.

2. There is a direct relationship between worker education focused on work with natural families of children and length of stay in foster care.

3. There is a direct relationship between worker education focused on work with natural families of children in foster care and the number of children who will return home following foster care.

4. There is a direct relationship between worker education focused on work with the natural families of children in foster care and the choice of the most appropriate outcome for children not able to return to their families. From these propositions, specific hypotheses may be developed for emperical research directed by improving the situation of children faces with the prospect of foster care.